Suspension of Business As Usual Highway Services

A framework for defensible decision-making during major incidents and extreme events

Authored by

John A. Lamb FCIHT FIHEng FCILT

Chair, UK Adaptation, Biodiversity and Climate Change Board (ABC Board)

UK Roads Leadership Group

UK Representative, PIARC World Disaster Management Committee (TC1.5)

★★★ **Status** ★★★

This document is shared as draft for consultation.

Feedback is requested by 30th June 2026.

Document ownership: UK **A**daptation, **B**iodiversity and **C**limate **R**esilience Board (ABC Board), UK Roads Leadership Group

Status: Published for sector comment. Rapid deployment by Local Highway Authorities is encouraged where no equivalent local procedures apply.

Published: May 2026

Comments to: Hosted on the UKRLG website. Comments from the sector are invited.

*With gratitude and thanks to **Derbyshire County Council**, who have been operating a version of this Plan since 2019; to the many sector colleagues across **UKRLG** who have shaped this document and to **East Riding of Yorkshire Council** with their ongoing progress in building a sector leading Highways Adaptation Centre of Excellence.*

Comments to john.lamb@eastriding.gov.uk

UK Adaptation, Biodiversity, and Climate Change Board

UK Roads Leadership Group

Suspension of Business As Usual Highway Services

A framework for defensible decision-making during major incidents and extreme events

Background to Directors and Heads of Service

This document is not about an average day. It is not about managing the usual pressures of a busy Highway Authority in a difficult winter. It is about your worst day ever — and whether you and your teams are ready for it before it arrives.

This document is addressed to Directors of Highways, Heads of Service, Operations Managers, Emergency Planning leads, and frontline SQEEP-empowered officers across all Local Highway Authorities in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is offered freely to the sector as a framework for adoption and adaptation.

The UK has experienced a sequence of extreme weather events that have overwhelmed highway authorities unprepared for what they faced: Storm Arwen, Storm Desmond, Storm Eva, Storm Bert, Storm Darragh. The UK Roads Leadership Group 2025 "Emergency Preparedness, Response & Recovery" sets out in unambiguous terms what the sector has learned — and what it has repeatedly failed to act upon. The pattern is consistent: authorities that have lived through a major event develop readiness; those that have not tend to plan for a repeat of what they have already seen, rather than for what climate science and operational evidence tells us is coming. The same principles of pre-authorised decision-making and documented response apply equally where a major incident arises from a non-meteorological cause.

That report echoed UK Government 2016 "**the sector to prepare for 'Storm Desmond plus 30%'**". During UKRLG 2025-6 National workshops Met Office stated, sub-daily rainfall events of 200mm or more are already occurring in the UK. A Valencia-scale flood — the event that killed over 200 people in November 2024 — has not yet struck a major UK built-up area, but it is not a question of whether, but when this will occur. We must also think beyond weather to wider civil emergencies and threats.

Your worst day will not announce itself with adequate notice. It will arrive when resources are already stretched, when the weather forecast was ambiguous, and when someone on your team — possibly alone, possibly at 3am — has to make a decision that is defensible, proportionate, and in the public interest. This document exists to make that possible.

Who should read and act on this document

Directors and Heads of Service: review, absorb, and embed this framework in your authority's arrangements. Modify the trigger thresholds and decision log to fit your system. Ensure it is exercised and tested before it is needed.

Group Managers, Service Managers and Operations Managers: this is your operational guide; Know it. The trigger table and quick-reference checklist (Appendix 3) are your tools under pressure.

Emergency Planners: incorporate this into your multi-agency arrangements and ensure the SCG/TCG are aware of highways suspension protocols.

Frontline SQEEP-empowered officers: Appendix 3 is yours. Pre-authorised decisions are here. Use them. Record everything.

1. Legislative and policy foundation

Highway Authorities do not choose whether to respond during extreme events — the law requires it. Understanding the legal framework that both compels response and provides protection for defensible decisions is essential for every manager who may need to make a suspension call.

1.1 Statutory duties

Under Section 41 of the Highways Act 1980 Councils have a statutory duty to maintain highways maintainable at public expense. Section 41(1A) places a specific duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that safe passage is not endangered by snow or ice — requiring clearance of these hazards as a priority over routine maintenance.

Under Section 130, the Highway Authority must assert and protect the rights of the public to use and enjoy the highway, including the removal of obstructions. Under Section 150(1), the Authority must remove accumulations of snow forming an obstruction, with Section 150(3) requiring regard to: the character of the highway and traffic using it; the nature and extent of the obstruction; the resources available and the extent to which they are deployed on such work.

These duties do not disappear during a major incident. What changes is the framework within which they are discharged. Suspension of normal service levels is not an abandonment of statutory duty — it is the legally defensible, documented reordering of priorities when resources are insufficient to meet all demands simultaneously.

1.2 Civil Contingencies Act 2004

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 places a duty on local authorities to ensure they are prepared, as far as reasonably practicable, to continue to provide critical functions during any disruptive challenge. Local Highway Authorities are Category 1 responders. This designation carries obligations — for planning, training, exercising, and multi-agency coordination — that extend well beyond the boundaries of routine highway management; this includes threat generated emergencies.

1.3 Related plans

This Suspension Plan sits within a wider framework of plans that should be read together and exercised together: this would typically include (and local naming may differ).

- LRF Multi-Agency Emergency Plan (natural hazards and threat scenarios)
- LRF Multi-Agency Severe Weather Plan
- LRF Multi-Agency Flood Plan
- Network Resilience Plan
- Business Continuity Plan
- Highway Infrastructure Asset Safety Inspection Manual
- Reactive Maintenance Team Operational Manual (RMTOM)
- Winter Service Plan
- Out-of-Hours Protocols — including empowerment provisions for decisions made when managers are unavailable

It is for each Highway Authority to describe how these plans interact and to exercise that interaction regularly — not just the individual components. The reports UKRLG 2025 Emergency Preparedness, Response & Recovery and the DfT Lessons Learned from Extreme Weather Emergencies (2021) provide the national evidence base. Both should be read before this plan is adopted. UKRLG 2025 Webinar provides further context.

2. Normal service levels and what suspension means

Every Highway Authority defines and publishes its inspection frequencies, response times, and service standards for the assets it maintains i.e. carriageways, footways, cycleways, structures, drainage, street lighting, and trees. These standards are not suspended lightly or informally. Suspension is a formal, documented, and time-limited decision.

2.1 Standard response times

Reactive maintenance work is issued with a response time determined by risk assessment at the point of defect identification or customer report. Typical response categories include:

Response category	Standard
Emergency	2 hours from notification
Priority	24/ 48 hours
Routine	7-28 working days
Programmed	>28 working days
Response categories and timescales vary between authorities. The above illustrates a common structure; each Highway Authority will apply its own policy.	

During major incidents, it may not be possible to meet these timescales. Reactive works during extreme events may also include stabilising assets at risk of failure and installing temporary safe passage for specific user groups (for example, closing a road to all but pedestrians).

2.2 What suspension is — and what it is not

Suspension is:

- A formal, documented, time-limited decision to reorder priorities when resources are insufficient to meet all demands simultaneously.
- A legally defensible reallocation of limited resources to the highest-priority life-safety and lifeline infrastructure tasks.
- A decision that must be recorded, communicated, reviewed, and reversed as soon as practicable.

Suspension is not:

- An abandonment of statutory duty.
- An informal or undocumented arrangement.
- A permanent change to service levels.
- A decision that can be taken without considering the options set out in Section 3.

3. Triggers, thresholds, and the suspension decision

The essential function of this document is to establish preset triggers to be applied by the on-duty Suitably Qualified, Experienced and Empowered Professional (SQEEP) without waiting for senior management availability. Where triggers are agreed in advance, embedded through training, and tested through exercise, the decision to suspend normal service becomes defensible, consistent, and rapid.

Without preset triggers, the alternative is improvisation under extreme pressure — the worst conditions in which to make a consequential, public-facing decision. This is not acceptable.

3.1 Options before suspension

Service suspension should only be formally declared once the following options have been considered and found insufficient or impractical:

1	Providing additional resources using existing staff through overtime payments
2	Providing additional internal resources from other highway sections
3	Requesting mutual aid from neighbouring authorities or external contractors

Implementing any of the above will itself impact other highways service activity. That impact must also be recorded.

3.2 Suspension triggers

The following triggers have been established based on operational experience, including field use in Calderdale MBC (Winter 2025–26). They are requirements, not suggestions. Each LHA should adopt them, adjusting thresholds to local conditions, and test them through exercise before being needed.

Area of service	Trigger	Pre-authorised action
Reactive maintenance Highway safety inspections	Available qualified resources fall to ≤50% of normal establishment	Suspend programmed and 28-day reactive works. Maintain emergency (2hr) and priority (48hr) response only. Record and report to Service Director.
Reactive maintenance Winter service Highway safety inspections	Depot fuel, materials, or plant availability falls to ≤75% of normal levels	Prioritise fuel and materials for life-safety operations. Suspend non-essential works immediately. Activate emergency supply contingency. Notify Service Director and procure supply with urgency.
Reactive maintenance Highway safety inspections	Prolonged adverse weather prevents safe or practical route access or route visibility	Suspend works in affected areas. Maintain monitoring. Re-deploy resources to accessible priority locations. Review every 4 hours.
Reactive maintenance Highway safety inspections	Sudden event creates immediate network unavailability or requires all available workforce in one location	Pre-authorised suspension of all non-emergency works. On-duty SQEEP officer may declare without management confirmation if contact is not possible within 30 minutes. Record time, reason, and action taken.
Winter service	Departmental resources fall to ≤90% of required levels for primary/secondary routes	Prioritise primary routes. Suspend secondary and tertiary gritting unless safety critical. Record delays on proprietary systems. Notify Service Director.
General highways — all service areas	Circumstances creating exceptional demand beyond what is considered business as usual — including sudden events of any origin where the cause is not yet determined	Service Director or delegated SQEEP officer may declare partial or full suspension. All decisions recorded in Appendix 2 60 mins. of decision.

These triggers are not exhaustive. Other circumstances may require suspension including threat generated demand. The reason and evidence for any additional suspension must be recorded in the Decision Log (Appendix 2).

3.3 Out-of-hours decisions

Out-of-hours conditions requiring decisions are precisely the moment when preset triggers matter most. A single crew focused on a first-response job in a remote part of the authority during a storm has, de facto, already suspended normal service elsewhere. The question is whether that suspension is documented and defensible, or improvised and invisible.

Out-of-hours requirement

Every Highway Authority must designate SQEEP-empowered officers at each tier — Strategic (Gold), Tactical (Silver), Operational (Bronze) — with pre-agreed authority to declare suspension without waiting for management confirmation.

The on-duty officer must know: - which trigger has been reached; what pre-authorised action applies; and what must be recorded.

If management contact is not possible within 30 minutes of a suspension-triggering event, the on-duty officer is pre-authorised to act and must record the decision within 1 hour.

Out-of-hours suspension decisions must be reported to the Service Director at the earliest opportunity and no later than the start of the next working day.

4. Awareness, impact assessment, defensible prioritisation

Making a suspension decision is not enough. The harder question — and the one that determines whether a response is genuinely effective — is where to focus the resources that remain. That requires situational awareness and consequence-based impact assessment.

Experience shared through PIARC (Which UKRLG is a member of) describe the same operational pivot that this document formalises. When a major event strikes, the emphasis shifts from routine performance measures to 'understanding what has failed, what is at risk of failing, and what those failures mean for communities.' That shift is largely implicit, born of a long tradition of site-level decision-making across a vast network. In the UK, with its more centralised structures, that shift must be deliberate, documented, and defensible. That is what this section provides.

4.1 Building situational awareness

In the initial stages of a major event, the key information sources informing a suspension decision are:

- Partner agencies — LRF partners declaring a Major Incident and shifting to coordination roles
- Weather forecasts — Met Office Amber or Red warnings; Flood Forecasting Centre Rapid Flood Guidance Statement; Natural Hazards Partnership Daily Hazard Summary
- CCTV at key network locations
- Any automated remote sensing e.g. water levels in underpasses, earth movement detection
- Call centre logs — public reports of flooding, blockages, or hazards
- Social media — geo-located public reports from members of the public
- Contractors and field operatives at scene
- Police and blue-light partners — particularly where network disruption has a cause that is not yet confirmed as meteorological or structural

The Met Office, the Flood Forecasting Centre, and the Natural Hazards Partnership provide forecast products that can give up to five days' notice of impending events. These products are not yet used routinely by most highways' decision-makers — but they must be. The same maturity the sector has developed around ice and snow forecasting — a trained cohort of winter decision-makers familiar with weather forecasting products and confident in acting on them — must now be extended across the full range of hazards.

Before that information can drive a decision, it must be verified. The following framework for verification has value in decision making

	What to assess
Relevance	Does this information bear directly on the decisions I need to make right now?
Accuracy	Is the source reliable? Has the information been cross-checked against other sources?
Timeliness	Is this current? Could the situation have changed since this was reported?
Sufficiency	Is there enough information to act on, or does more need to be gathered before a decision is made?
Credibility	Is the source authoritative? Is there a reason this information might be partial, misleading, or wrong?

Applying RATSC is not a bureaucratic exercise — it is the mental discipline that separates a defensible decision from a reactive one. It takes seconds when it is habitual, and it is most easily applied when the information entering the system is structured and consistent — which is precisely what Rapid Impact Assessment is designed to deliver.

4.2 From situational awareness to defensible prioritisation

Once information has been verified, the critical next step is not simply to list what has happened — it is to assess what it means. A highway manager leading up to and during a major incident must simultaneously monitor specific information about their network, understand what that information means for communities and what might happen next, maintaining situational awareness of broader impacts — all whilst coordinating a response with partner agencies.

That requires a clear framework for prioritisation. The formula is:

Impact = (Damage × Consequences) x Duration of effect

Figure 1 illustrates this formula in practice: physical damage to an asset assessed against the network consequences of that damage — including access to critical infrastructure, community connectivity, and vulnerability of the surrounding population. Source: UKRI/DfT-funded Network Resilience programme, DfT & LGTAG.

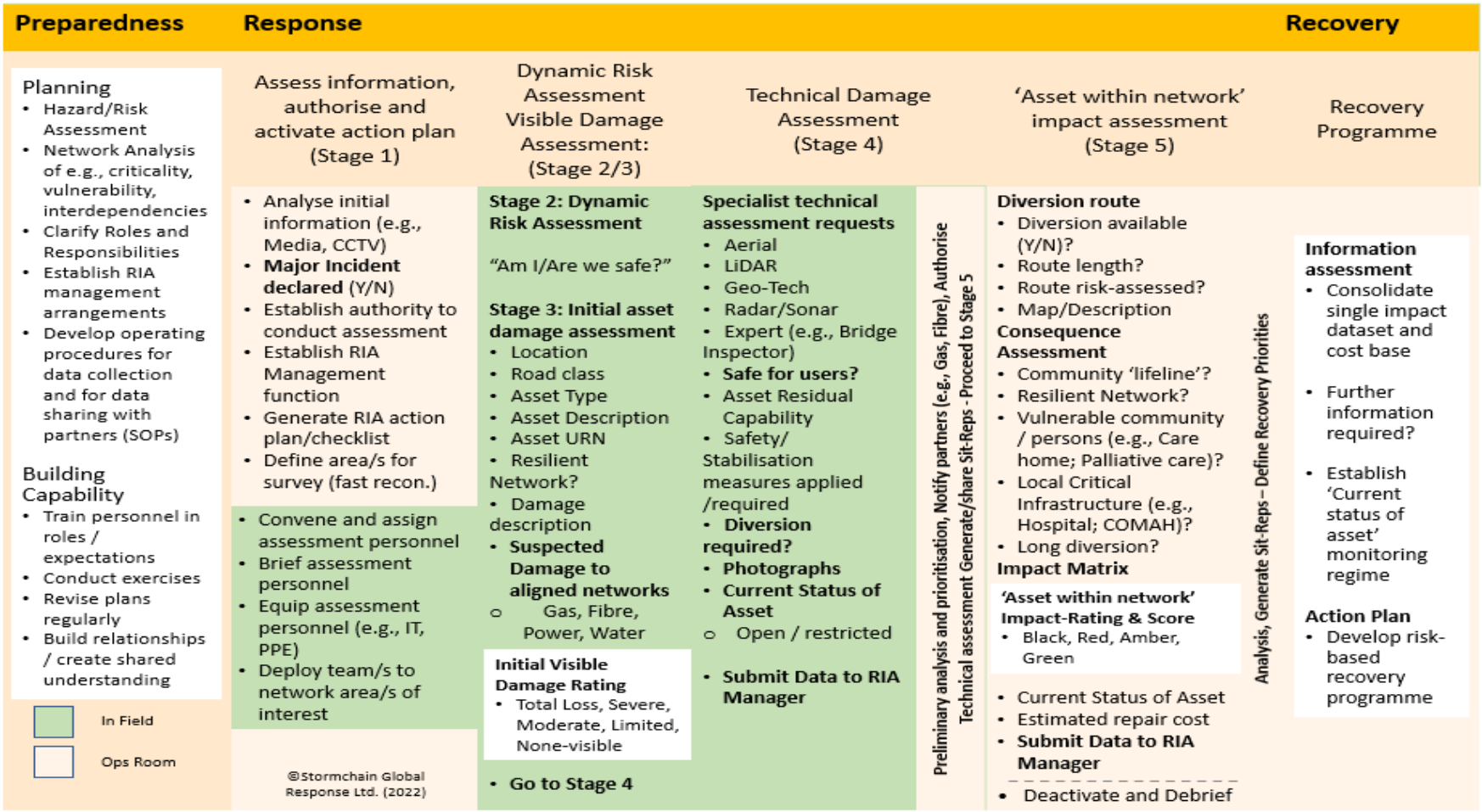
Damage alone does not determine priority. A collapsed retaining wall on a rural unclassified road and a collapsed retaining wall blocking access to a hospital may be structurally identical — their consequences are not. A blocked gully causing localised standing water and a blocked gully flooding the only access route to an isolated community are not equivalent problems. Consequence-based assessment is what separates defensible prioritisation from ad hoc response.

The practical implication — understood by any experienced manager who has lived through a major event — is that during an emergency, rapid consequence-focused insight across the whole system is far more valuable than detailed characterisation of a small number of assets. The instinct to deploy asset managers to conduct thorough inspections of individual structures must give way, during the acute phase, to rapid triage across the network. As one experienced Service Director put it:

> *'I do not want a full asset inspection. I NEED Rapid Insight. Asset managers, left to their own devices, took all day to look at three structures — when I had asked them to triage twenty.'* John Lamb, former Chief Officer, Calderdale MBC

4.3 The five-stage Rapid Impact Assessment process

The recognised methodology for consequence-based highway impact assessment is the five-stage Rapid Impact Assessment (RIA) process, developed through PIARC international research co-funded by DfT and the US Federal Highway Administration, and tested through the DfT-funded FloodEx22 exercise programme. It is recognised best practice in declaring, managing, and recovering from major highway incidents.



Two points about the five-stage process deserve particular emphasis for managers using this document.

First, Stage 1 — the definition of the Network Area of Interest — is a deliberate pre-deployment decision, made by the manager, not in the field by operatives. It focuses the whole assessment. Getting it wrong wastes the most valuable resource in an emergency: time.

Second, the distinction between Stages 3 and 4 is the practical answer to the asset management instinct that slows emergency response.

The Visible Damage Rating at Stage 3 is fast, consistent, and network wide.

The Technical Damage Assessment at Stage 4 is targeted, deep, and applied only where Stage 3 evidence justifies it. The RIA process does not bypass professional engineering judgement — it sequences it correctly.

Stage	Name	Key Points from Five Stage RIA
1	**Selection of a defined Network Area of Interest**	A management decision taken before deployment. Scopes where resources go. Getting it wrong wastes the most valuable resource in an emergency: time
2	**Declaration of a Major Incident**	RIA activates here. Suspension of BAU and activation of RIA are concurrent decisions, not sequential ones.
3	**Initial assessment — Dynamic Risk Assessment to Visible Damage Rating**	Field operatives deployed across the Area of Interest. Fast, consistent, network wide. A VDR — not a detailed structural inspection. Speed and coverage matter more than depth at this stage.
4	**Technical Damage Assessment**	Targeted at assets Stage 3 has flagged. Engineering expertise deployed where the evidence justifies it, not uniformly from the outset.
5	**'Asset within network' Impact Assessment and Rating**	Damage combined with consequence — network significance, community impact, vulnerability. Produces the Impact score that drives defensible prioritisation.

4.4 RIA as the expected standard — honest assessment of where the sector is

Structured RIA is the expected standard for all authorities adopting this Plan. That statement requires an honest acknowledgement: most UK Highway Authorities are not yet consistently applying it.

The exercising gap

FloodEx22 (November 2022) remains the last occasion on which the UK highway sector was tested in a regional multi-agency exercise. The evidence is unambiguous: authorities with structured impact assessment capability produced geo-located, prioritised incident lists rapidly; those without equivalent capability were still unable to provide basic situational awareness by the end of the exercise day, even when directly requested by exercise control.

This is not a technology gap. It is a competency gap — one that is closed through training, practice, and the pre-agreed methodology this section describes. Authorities adopting this Plan are required to have a structured RIA approach in place, or to be actively developing one, before the next major event arrives.

The evidence from recent exercises by early-adopter authorities is instructive. Where structured RIA is in place, managers generate geo-located, consequence-scored, shareable incident pictures within hours of deployment. Where it is not, the picture that emerges — however hard-working the individuals involved, and however under-resourced LHA's are — is fragmented, inconsistent, and difficult to act on at scale. The difference is not talent or commitment. It is methodology and prior training.

A further consistent finding is that the quality of RIA output is directly related to the seniority and prior training of the operative completing it. In a Storm Desmond-scale event — with hundreds or even thousands of incidents of varying severity spread across a wide area — the manager in the incident room cannot rely on senior staff completing every field assessment. The methodology must be robust enough to deliver usable output from the full range of operatives who will be deployed. That requires mandatory field discipline, consistent prior training, and pre-agreed minimum data standards — built in before the event, not improvised during it.

International experience confirms the same pattern. Practitioners managing some of the most severe highway disaster conditions in the PIARC member community — including the 2021 atmospheric river events in British Columbia — have observed that response costs, recovery costs, and durations are routinely lost in the transition from response to recovery. That observation carries weight because it comes from those who have managed multi-incident, wide-area events at scale, not researchers. The Decision Log in Appendix 2 closes that gap: evidence built across multiple events makes the next response faster, the next funding case stronger, the next mutual aid arrangement better-designed. Put simply: the data exists; the discipline to capture it does not yet.

4.5 From event data to national evidence - the Highways Disaster Impact Scale

The data generated through this Plan — consequence scores, damage ratings, response costs, recovery timelines, and duration records captured in the Decision Log — has value beyond the individual event. Aggregated across events, authorities, and hazard types, it forms the primary evidence base for a structured post-incident classification instrument developed specifically for the highway sector: the Highways Disaster Impact Scale (HDIS).

The HDIS (in draft for consultation from mid-June 2026) provides, for the first time in the highway sector, a structured and comparable classification of disaster severity — the equivalent of the Richter scale for earthquakes. It enables a Local Highway Authority to demonstrate, to a coroner, a funding body, or an elected member, exactly where an event sits relative to others: what it demanded, why suspension was warranted, and what the consequences of inadequate preparation would have been. For Bellwin and DfT exceptional funding applications, it converts operational experience into defensible, comparable evidence.

The HDIS requires no additional data collection: every field it draws on is already captured in the five-stage RIA process and the Decision Log this Plan establishes. The two instruments are designed to work in sequence — structured RIA and the Decision Log drive and record the response; the HDIS classifies it afterwards, placing it in a growing national evidence base that makes the next response faster, the next funding case stronger, and the next mutual aid arrangement better-designed. The HDIS is available as a companion document to this Plan *to be issued during consultation on this draft*.

5. The suspension decision process

5.1 During normal office hours

When a trigger threshold is identified during office hours, the following process must be followed:

1	Confirm the trigger: identify threshold reached or imminent (Table 1 Section 3.2)
2	Consider the three options (Section 3.1): overtime, internal redeployment, mutual aid are not possible
3	Notify the Service Director or equivalent and seek approval under a specific trigger.
4	Define the scope of suspension: which service areas, which geographic area, which time period.
5	Complete the Decision Log (Appendix 2) immediately: trigger, area, reason, action, interim levels, review date
6	Activate the Communications Plan: notify relevant parties within and outside the Council (see Section 6).
7	Notify neighbouring authorities and, where a Major Incident is declared or anticipated, appraise the SCG/TCG.
8	Set a review date: no longer than two weeks from declaration, or sooner if the event warrants it.

5.2 Out of hours (see also Section 3.3)

The process for out-of-hours suspension follows the same steps, with the following adaptations:

- Steps 1 and 2 apply in full. The on-duty SQEEP officer must confirm the trigger and consider alternatives before acting.
- Step 3 (management notification): attempt contact. If not possible within 30 minutes, proceed under pre-authorised authority and document the attempt.
- Steps 5, 6, and 7 are completed by the on-duty officer at the time of the decision, however brief. A full Decision Log entry must be completed within 1 hour.
- Step 8 (review date): set for the next working day as a minimum.
- Report to Service Director at the start of the next working day without exception.

5.3 Area-wide and cross-boundary events

Suspension may be partial — applying to one area of the authority while normal service continues elsewhere — or authority-wide. In the case of large-scale, area-wide events:

- Shared situational awareness with neighbouring authorities is essential. At the time of writing, cross-boundary situational awareness in the UK highway sector is poor. This is an acknowledged gap that this Plan is designed to begin addressing.
- Where cross-boundary routes are affected, coordination with neighbouring authorities is required. Authorities must not push traffic into roads that are not ready or create mutual aid obligations that have not been agreed.
- During a declared Major Incident, coordinate through the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) and Tactical Coordinating Group (TCG). At a minimum, ensure the SCG/TCG are fully apprised of suspension arrangements before they affect partner agency operations.
- Large-scale events may require a 'larger than local' response. DfT/MHCLG escalation exists for events that exceed local capacity. Know your escalation path before you need it.

Cross-boundary minimum expectation

Before any major event is concluded, the on-duty manager must have made direct contact with at least one neighbouring authority to compare situational awareness.

Where an authority has no mechanism for cross-boundary situational awareness, establishing one — even informally at first — is a requirement of adopting this Plan.

6. Communications during suspension

A suspension decision that is not communicated is a decision that cannot be defended. Every suspension triggers a communications obligation. This is not optional.

6.1 Internal communications

At the point of suspension declaration, the following must be notified:

Recipient	What they need to know
Service Director / Head of Service	Trigger reached, scope of suspension, interim service levels, review date.
Portfolio Holder / Elected Members	That suspension has been declared, what it means for residents, what the authority is doing and why.
Customer Contact Centre & Press / Comms Teams	Revised response times, messaging for public enquiries, escalation route for complaints. Prepare public messaging as below at 6.2
Emergency Planning team	Suspension status, impacts on multi-agency arrangements, whether SCG/TCG notification is required.
Asset Management. Legal / Insurance and Finance	Record of suspension for audit, Bellwin scheme eligibility tracking, cost capture from declaration point.

6.2 External and public communications

The public communication narrative during suspension must be proactive, honest, and consistent. The core messages are:

- We are responding: the authority is actively deploying resources to the highest-priority locations.
- Why we are prioritising: safety-critical and lifeline infrastructure comes first. Other works are suspended to enable this.
- What residents can expect: revised response timescales, where to report emergencies, and when normal service will be reviewed.
- What we are dealing with: a general description of the scale and nature of the event, without disclosing operationally sensitive network information.

Communications channels should include: council website, social media (reactive and proactive), one.network or equivalent for works management, and direct notification to partner agencies and utility companies.

The communications lead must be identified at the point of suspension declaration. This role does not default to the operational manager — it requires dedicated capacity with clear messaging authority.

7. Review, resumption, and continuous improvement

7.1 Reviewing suspension

Interim service levels must be reviewed by the Highways Management Team on the timescale specified in the Decision Log — and no less frequently than every two weeks. Even after a short but intense event, it may be days, weeks, or months before Business as Usual can fully return.

At each review, the following questions must be answered and recorded:

- Is the original trigger still in force, or has the situation changed?
- Have interim service levels been met? If not, why not?
- Are there areas where normal service can be partially restored?
- What is the impact on the programmed maintenance backlog?
- What is the current expenditure position, and is Bellwin applicable?
- Have neighbouring authorities been updated?

7.2 Resuming normal service

The decision to resume normal service is as formal as the decision to suspend it. It must be documented in the Decision Log, communicated to the same audiences that received the suspension notification, and include a clear date from which normal response times apply.

Resumption is not a single moment — it is likely to be staged, with emergency response restored first, then priority works, then routine and programmed works as the backlog is addressed. Each stage should be explicitly recorded.

7.3 Debrief and continuous improvement

After every major event that triggers suspension, a structured debrief is required. This is not optional. The debrief should:

- Review each decision against the trigger criteria — was the correct trigger applied? Was the response proportionate?
- Identify what worked, what did not, and what was missing.
- Update the trigger table, Decision Log template, and Communications Plan based on lessons learned.
- Share findings with the LRF, neighbouring authorities, and — where the event has regional or national significance — with the UKRLG.
- Feed into the authority's training and exercise programme to ensure improvements are embedded before the next event.

The Calderdale test

A draft of this Suspension Plan was used operationally in Calderdale MBC during severe weather in Winter 2025–26. The experience confirmed the value of pre-agreed triggers and the critical importance of the Decision Log as a real-time audit trail. It also identified the out-of-hours decision framework as the element requiring the most deliberate advance preparation.

Authorities adopting this Plan should not wait for a major event to test it. Exercise it. The worst outcome is discovering its gaps on your worst day.

8. SQEEP, training, and empowerment

The concept of Suitably Qualified, Experienced and Empowered Personnel (SQEEP) is the competency model this document is built around. It is not sufficient for individuals to be qualified and experienced — they must also be empowered: trusted by their organisation to make consequential decisions in the field, under pressure, without waiting for permission that may not be available.

Empowerment is not a personality trait. It is an organisational condition. It requires:

- Clear pre-agreed authority: knowing what decisions can be made at each tier without escalation.
- Training: familiarity with the trigger criteria, the decision process, and the Decision Log before the event.
- Exercise: testing the whole system under realistic pressure — including out-of-hours scenarios.
- Organisational backing: managers and Directors who will support decisions made in good faith under uncertainty, even when those decisions are later questioned.

The UKRLG 2025 report identified a consistent pattern: where SQEEP-empowered personnel were engaged at every tier of the Strategic (Gold), Tactical (Silver), and Operational (Bronze) response, outcomes were measurably better. Where Gold-level officers lacked appropriate training, they effectively borrowed competence from Silver-trained juniors — a practice that creates both operational risk and legal exposure.

Budget pressures across Local Highway Authorities are real and acknowledged. This document does not require new expenditure. It requires that existing roles, existing plans, and existing exercises are properly connected — and that the decisions made under pressure are documented. The cost of preparedness is modest. The cost of unpreparedness — in post-event recovery expenditure, legal exposure, Bellwin claims, and reputational damage — is not.

The Decision Log in Appendix 2 is free to use. The trigger framework in Section 3 requires training time, not capital. The exercise programme described in Section 7.3 can be conducted within existing arrangements. Authorities working under severe resource constraint are encouraged to treat this Plan not as an additional burden but as a framework that makes existing resources work harder — and that provides the defensibility evidence needed when funding cases are made after a major event.

Training requirements for this Plan

Every officer designated as a SQEEP-empowered decision-maker under this Plan must: have read and understood this document in full; know which triggers apply to their tier; have completed at least one exercise involving a simulated suspension decision; and know how to complete the Decision Log.

These requirements must be documented. In the event of a challenge to a suspension decision, the training record is part of the defensibility evidence.

Appendix 1: Suspension decision flowchart

Based on the Derbyshire CC original process (used with consent). The Visio source file is available on request. The following text version is provided for reference and for adaptation into each authority's own system.

START	**A trigger threshold is reached or is expected to be reached imminently.**
▼	Confirm which trigger in Table 1 (Section 3.2) applies.
▼	Consider and document the three pre-suspension options (Section 3.1). Is overtime available? Internal redeployment? Mutual aid?
▼	**DECISION POINT: Can normal service be maintained with available resources and options?**
YES	Continue normal service. Document that trigger was considered and options were sufficient. Monitor and reassess.
NO	Proceed to suspension declaration. Notify Service Director (or act on pre-authorised authority if out of hours and contact not possible within 30 minutes).
▼	Define scope: which services, which area, which period. Set interim service levels.
▼	Complete Decision Log (Appendix 2) within 1 hour.
▼	Activate Communications Plan (Section 6). Notify internal stakeholders and public-facing channels.
▼	Notify neighbouring authorities and appraise SCG/TCG if Major Incident is declared or anticipated.
▼	Set review date. Conduct review. Repeat until normal service is resumed.
END	**Resumption of normal service formally declared, documented, and communicated. Debrief completed and plan updated.**

Appendix 2: Suspension of Services — Decision Log

This log must be completed for every suspension decision, including those made under pre-authorised authority. It is the primary audit document. Based on the Derbyshire CC original (used with consent).

Unique Reference Number (URN)	[Authority prefix] / [Year] / [Sequential number]
Date and time of declaration	
Declaring officer (name and role)	
Trigger reached (from Table 1)	*Including Natural hazard / Civil Emergency / threat*
Pre-suspension options considered	Overtime: [Y/N, reason] Internal redeployment: [Y/N, reason] Mutual aid: [Y/N, reason]
Management authorisation	Name: Time contacted: Decision:
If out-of-hours — contact attempted?	Time of attempt: Outcome: Pre-authorised authority invoked: [Y/N]
Area affected	
Services suspended	
Interim service levels in place	
Estimated start date	
Estimated end date / review date	
Communications plan activated	Internal notifications sent: [Y/N] Public messaging issued: [Y/N] Neighbouring authorities notified: [Y/N] SCG/TCG notified: [Y/N]
Bellwin trigger considered	[Y/N] — expenditure tracking commenced from:
Management Team review date	
Management Team approval given	Name: Date:
Resumption date	
Resumption declared by	
Debrief completed	[Y/N] — Date:

The data recorded in this Decision Log — response costs, recovery costs, durations, affected areas, and consequence assessments — forms the primary evidence base for classification under the Highways Disaster Impact Scale (HDIS, Lamb and Deeming, 2026), enabling defensible post-event comparison across events, hazard types, and authorities.

Example entries are provided below. These are drawn from operational use and are for training and familiarisation purposes.

URN	Trigger	Start	Area	Action taken / interim service level
[Auth]/2019/1	Reactive maintenance — staff availability	04/03/2019	North East area only	Agency staff sought. Emergency and winter priorities only. 9-day and 28-day targets extended by 10 working days.
[Auth]/2019/2	Inspections — inspector workforce absence	13/05/2019	South area only	Agency staff sought. Inspection frequency changed from monthly to 6-weekly. All safety inspection service levels maintained.
[Auth]/2019/3	General — nationwide fuel shortage	29/04/2019	County-wide	Emergency services given limited fuel priority. All response times increased by 5 days per category pending supply restoration.

The data recorded in this Decision Log — response costs, recovery costs, durations, affected areas, and consequence assessments — forms the primary evidence base for classification under the Highways Disaster Impact Scale (HDIS, Lamb and Deeming, 2026), enabling defensible post-event comparison across events, hazard types, and authorities.

Appendix 3: Quick Reference — The 3am decision tool

This page is for the on-duty officer. It assumes you have already read and been trained on this document. If you are using this for the first time under pressure, work through it step by step.

STEP 1 — Have you reached a trigger?

- ☐ Staff availability ≤50% of normal → suspend programmed and 28-day works
- ☐ Fuel/materials/plant ≤75% → prioritise life-safety, suspend non-essential works immediately
- ☐ Adverse weather prevents route access → suspend works in affected area, redeploy
- ☐ Sudden event / all workforce needed at one location → pre-authorised full suspension
- ☐ Winter service resources ≤90% → prioritise primary routes, suspend secondary gritting
- ☐ Exceptional demand beyond BAU → proceed to Step 2

STEP 2 — Have you considered the three options?

- ☐ Overtime — available? If not, why not: _____
- ☐ Internal redeployment — available? If not, why not: _____
- ☐ Mutual aid — requested? From whom: _____

STEP 3 — Notify management (or invoke pre-authorised authority)

- ☐ Attempt to contact Service Director / designated manager

Time of attempt: _____ Outcome: _____

- ☐ **If no contact within 30 minutes → you are pre-authorised to act. Record this.**

STEP 4 — Define scope and act

Services suspended: _____
Area affected: _____
Interim service levels: _____
Review date/time: _____

STEP 5 — Record and communicate (within 1 hour)

- ☐ Complete Decision Log (Appendix 2)
- ☐ Notify Customer Contact Centre of revised response times
- ☐ Contact at least one neighbouring authority — share situational awareness
- ☐ If Major Incident declared or anticipated → notify Emergency Planning / appraise SCG/TCG
- ☐ Report to Service Director at start of next working day without exception

Emergency contacts — insert your authority's details	Number
Service Director / Head of Service	
Emergency Planning Officer / OOH	
Out-of-Hours Depot / Control Room	
Neighbouring Authority (North)	

Neighbouring Authority (South)	
SCG/TCG Duty Officer	
Customer Contact Centre	
DfT / MHCLG escalation (if required)	

Remember: if it is not recorded, it did not happen.

Every decision — including the decision not to suspend — must be documented. The Decision Log is your protection as much as it is the authority's audit trail.

If you are uncertain whether a trigger has been reached, record that you considered it. That record is itself a defensible act.